

HALO 3 TERMINALS

Part 1: Forerunner Communication

First Contact with the Flood

Follow-up report from the Primary Pioneer Group (hereafter: PPG) is [173 hours] delinquent. Report [G617a~k/g/post_landfall] seemed most promising: a planet capable of supporting life located within the near border region of the [galactic halo] with no indigenous sentient species. The section indicating no fauna of any kind shall be considered anomalous until verified by Advance Survey Team-Alpha (hereafter: AST-A) team leader [##_#[?]] If confirmed, that fact alone would justify the dispatch of an investigative group to [G617g]. If neither the PPG or AST-A have delivered a follow-up report within the next [333 hours] this office will have no choice but to send a medium intensity military exploratory detachment to determine the exact nature of the previously mentioned delinquency.

Observation of the Flood on Two Worlds

Observed extensive ground action on [LP 656-38 e]. 9,045 survivors barricaded within central government building. Structure's defenses inadequate to withstand extended siege by enemy ground forces (1,572,034,315+). Estimated position overrun in [173 hours].

846 smaller groups in less defensible structures; global distribution corresponding to [probability model zeta]. Estimated local position overrun in [9 hours] (average).

Observed local naval forces engage enemy irregular naval group near [DM-3-1123]. Enemy group consisted of 149 commercial shipping vessels, passenger ferries, and private recreational vehicles from neighboring system. Enemy losses were total. No damage was sustained by local naval vessels.

However, it was immediately apparent that the enemy group sought only to enter [DM-3-1123 b's] atmosphere and make landfall. In this they were partially successful.

Observed extensive ground action on [DM-3-1123 b]. Enemy

forces lacked basic cohesion but quickly gained numerical superiority. [32 hours] after enemy landfall 83% of local naval forces advocated total [destruction of the biosphere] following the evacuation of unmolested population centers. Enemy losses were total.

Estimated number of citizens evacuated before commencement of orbital blanket bombardment: 1,318,797 civilian/42,669 military (.0006% of total population).

Forerunner Fleet Memorandum

//FLEETWIDE MEMORANDUM 1/5

Non-combat personnel are required to wear [combat skin] with a minimum rating of at least [class 12] in non-restricted areas, once the fleet is underway. [Class 14] or lesser [combat skin] is acceptable in core areas. Combat personnel will only be permitted to wear [combat skin] rated below [class 8] in core areas, once operations begin.

//FLEETWIDE MEMORANDUM 2/5

All combat personnel have been issued combat skin rated at [class 4~1] or [class 6~1 battle harness] depending on military operational specialty. All weapon platform specialists are expected to wear their issued [platform interface skin] at all times to ensure peak [mind-machine synchronization]. All [equipment lockers] will remain sealed until post briefing gear distribution commences.

//FLEETWIDE MEMORANDUM 3/5

Those individuals that have yet to register their equipment [control key code] with Fleet Command should do so at their earliest opportunity. Compliance is not optional; noncompliance will result in {~}

Forerunner Letter

[Father],

I hope this message finds you well and helps you understand my

decision. Today I leave the only world I have ever called home, not for glory or [the anomalous desire to end another's life[?]] as you have [indicted]; but to [travel the path of demons[?]] to spare the hands of [another Father's son].

"Had we acted sooner; had we acted more decisively..." Living in the past is a luxury none of us can afford. We must learn from it, but we cannot live there. It is impossible to plan for the [now]--the present is ever fleeting. [The future] is where we must live--[the future] is what we must plan for.

I do not look to trade my life in order to preserve our past, but to secure the future--and if not ours, then the future of some [culture] yet to come.

Isn't sacrifice in the interest of others what you always spoke of as being so noble? Should I have allowed another to bloody his hands while I remained safe behind a [shield of privilege]?

You raised me better than that.

[Filial Devotion]

[@_@;_%[?]]

The Librarian and the Didact - First Communique

L: Categorization has sped since the improvements were announced, but there are many hurdles. The indexing of sentient species may have irreversible effects on the surviving nonsentient species. We will have extinction events and irreparable environmental harm on at least 18 worlds. Current projections estimate post-archival cataclysm on as many as 31 worlds. The paucity of sentience has been a blessing in this regard.

D: How formal of you, Librarian. We're receiving shipments of indexed beings more frequently than communications. Don't compound scarcity with brevity. I know things beyond the [Maginot] line are harried. But I worry about you. I've asked you time and time again. Abandon your cataloging. Come back inside, where my fleets can keep you safe. Come home.

L: Would that it were my choice. I have committed to this course

because it is the right thing to do. We no longer have the manpower or material to excise remedial measures at a planetary level. I certainly can't justify using the [transit measure] to save my own skin when there are still so many innocents to protect and index.

D: You know I oppose your mission, but you're exceeding its parameters anyway. You've put yourself in jeopardy. You've done enough. If you will not come to me, I will find my way to you.

L: We have no time to spare, Didact. Every vessel we can fill, we send to the Ark. I dare not cease the mission. Not now, not until I've done all I can. Each one of these souls is finite and precious. And I'm close. Close to saving them all.

The Librarian and the Didact - Second Communique

L: I'm close to finishing the task. The indexing and the archival processes are as complete as I can hope for. If we wait longer, we risk catastrophe. The thing has already destroyed every colony on my side of the line. Please. Activate the Array.

D: No. Activation is murder. A genocide larger than [this galaxy] has ever known. We are sworn to protect life not destroy it! That is the Mantle we were given to carry.

L: The Mantle. You still hold to that [fairy tale] after all that has happened? After this thing has consumed a million worlds? Can't you see? Belief in the Mantle sealed our doom! Weakened our [protectorates], bred dependence and sloth. Our [so-called Guardianship] has stripped those we would keep safe of any capacity for self-defense! Were we such noble [Guardians] when we drew our line and abandoned billions to the parasite?

D: The Mantle has not failed! I've already razed scores of worlds - sterilized systems, routed and [disintegrated] the parasite! We're learning its tricks and strategies. We can halt this thing! And we can follow in Their footsteps! There are no unstoppable forces in this universe. There are no immovable objects. Everything gives if you push hard enough.

L: And what about us, Didact? We've been irresistible and immovable for too long. Maybe it's our turn to give.

The Librarian and the Didact - Third Communique

D: We have the answer. We've built Mendicant Bias. It's a contender-class [AI] unlike anything we've ever achieved. And we've observed a pattern it can exploit. The parasite has formed a Compound Mind. When it reaches a certain mass, the Mind is able to recoil its disparate parts to create a [tactical shield]. This is a simple matter of mass preservation. The thing has no compunction about sacrificing parts of the whole. But when the core of the Mind is threatened, it reacts violently and quickly. This is the only time we see it retract or slow its growth. If we are to defeat it, the trick will be coordinating our forays against the [sprawling infection] while Mendicant Bias assaults the Mind's core. So far, we've been hesitant to use certain weapons because of the damage they cause surviving populations and environments. That protocol has been abandoned. Mendicant Bias will draw the Mind into battle outside the line, dealing with local biomass and other parts as best he can. The scale of the problem is vast, but the strategy is sound. It will require patience, materiel and an investment of energy unlike anything we have ever considered. It's a dangerous plan that carries more risk than the Array, but I believe it can work. Even if we simply force it to retreat--to retract--that will at least give us some respite. Some time to muster more resources...Some time to rescue you.

L: Are you insane? Would you risk every life in the galaxy for this transparently futile plan? Have you learned nothing in these last [300 years[?]]? The thing will laugh at your efforts! Do not let your concern for my welfare commit you to this suicidal scheme!

The Librarian and the Didact - Fourth Communique

L: Something is wrong! It's moving away! At night I can see it – flitting shadows – black against the stars. Thousands of ships! Not spiraling outward but heading for the line. This is the tipping, Didact. It's no longer feeding. It's coming for you.

L: I've remotely destroyed our Keyships. A security measure. Without them I cannot reach the Ark. But neither then can the

thing. I'm trapped. On a beautiful, empty world. Its inhabitants have been safely indexed, every single one of them. They're special--well worth the effort it took to build one final gateway even at this late hour. This may be our last communication. I'm begging you. Fire the Array. Light the weapon, and let it be done.

D: We've confirmed your observations. Infected supraluminal ships are arrowing inward from several clusters. No more spiral growth. The thing is counterattacking. Suppression, Security and Emergency Circumstance fleets are all being recalled. Systems are evacuating. Mendicant Bias is no longer communicating with us. But now I can guess where you are.

The Librarian and the Didact - Fifth Communique

L: My work is done. The portal is inactive, and I've begun the burial measures. Soon there'll be nothing but sand and rock and normal ferrite signatures. You should see the mountain that watches over it. A beautiful thing--a snowcapped sentinel. That's where I will spend what time is left to me. Did I tell you? I built a garden. The earth is so rich. A seed falls and a tree sprouts or a flower blooms. There's so much...potential. We knew this was a special place because of them, but unless you've been here, you can't know. It's [Eden]. I have to stop transmitting. The thing is listening. Its [thinking dead] are babbling--laughing through every channel they can find. Be proud. The Mind claims victory, yet it still doesn't suspect. You've outwitted it, my love. And now you can destroy it. But you cannot save me.

The Librarian and the Didact - Sixth Communique

D: Proud? When I have failed you utterly, how can I feel anything but sorrow? Bias has come undone. He crossed the line this morning--brought the abomination with him--and destroyed your waiting rescue party. It's over. We're activating the [destruction arrayed matrix], our shameful last resort. I can picture you in your garden, surveying all you have created--surveying all you have preserved. And I curse the circumstance that keeps my finger on the trigger.

D: Of all the fates to befall us, this is the cruelest of all. My inaction and hesitation kept me here, on the wrong side of the line. And [300 years[?]] of our society's failure and miscalculation makes me your executioner. It's too much to bear.

//**ERROR--NO CARRIER OR RECEIPT AVAILABLE {DEAD END TRANSMISSION} //INFORMATION DESTROYED IN TRANSIT**

D: Mendicant Bias is trying to prevent us from firing the Array. He speeds back to the Ark, but he won't succeed. Offensive Bias will stop him, and I will burn this stinking menace in your name. And then? I will begin our Great Journey without you, carrying this bitter record. Those who came after will know what we bought with this [false transcendence]--what you bought, and the price you paid.

Part 2: Forerunner AI Reports

Mendicant Bias Report

[29,478 hours] have passed since I left the [Maginot] sphere and entered contested space. The enemy is everywhere.

Despite this the morale of my charges remains high. They wake, clean themselves, fuel their bodies, communicate with one another, eliminate waste, train to destroy the enemy, and return to sleep. The sacrifices they have chosen to make on behalf of their [brethren] fills me with pride. If only I could save them all - but they know, perhaps even better than I, that that is not possible.

[37 seconds] ago I moved beyond my ability to observe the events taking place on [CE-10-2165-d]. The importance of my mission forbade me from rendering any aid, but no less important was the need for me to study the enemy's capabilities in real world situations.

[2 hours] ago 12,423 small recreational vessels appeared inside [CE-10-2165-d's] orbital perimeter. Hidden within that vast swarm were seven massive freight carriers. The smaller craft were employed as [ablative armor], allowing the carriers to descend through the atmosphere; landing on top of major population

centers.

Despite the fact that the naval garrison was aware of the likelihood of just such an attack, their ability to effectively defend against it proved insufficient. This has always been the enemy's [modus operandi]: [flood] your opponent's ability to process information with so much noise that no meaningful resistance can be put into action.

[3 minutes] ago those same population centers began disappearing under brilliant flashes. This was not an ill conceived, poorly implemented counter attack; it was a deliberate denial of resources - those resources being the remainder of [CE-10-2165-d's] population.

Is this the noble sacrifice my creators spoke of? Where is the nobility in these streets paved with greasy carbon and dun ash? [My mouth is speaking at another's behest] - that is not my voice; that is the other. Its voice stands out as the single calm note in the panicked cacophony outside the sphere. It alone is not decrying its fate or raging against the [central government]. This anomaly bears closer examination.

Strategy Against the Flood by Mendicant

Re: Enemy naval tactics: When engaged, the enemy commits every non-supraluminal craft with no appreciable pattern or strategy beyond making physical contact. Conversely, all supraluminal craft leave on seemingly random trajectories. I understand the goal of this mission but time--our least abundant resource--is wasted every time we do a system-wide scan for survivors. The time for saving lives has passed. We must accept this if we hope to win the war.

Re: Enemy ground tactics: All evidence suggests that use of overwhelming force is the very foundation of the enemy's combat doctrine. And I adamantly refuse to deploy personnel where the enemy has available forces numbering in the billions. With the very real possibility we are becoming the last living specimens of our race, all personnel are henceforth confined to stasis until further notice. Even with everyone equipped with [C_12_CS [Class 12 Combat Suit]] we could have had very little chance of survival, let alone victory.

Re: Enemy command structure: We have intercepted several transmissions from compound intelligences whose proximity to the core worlds mark them as key targets. At present, we are disassembling these new transmissions. Once we have more [concrete conclusions] I will forward them in their entirety. Suffice to say that their contents--the patterns they suggest--are highly disturbing.

Recommendations: It is my opinion that any system where there is evidence that the enemy has established a physical presence is lost and must be razed. This fleet currently retains the capacity to force premature stellar collapse; I advise that this be established as standard operating procedure for all compromised systems forthwith. We cannot fight this war by half measures if we intend to win.

Recommendation for the Conservation Measure

Considering the enemy intelligence's raw [computing power], the Keyships' strategy will only remain viable for another [657,000 hours] and this current stalemate has the potential to last considerably longer than that.

With my understanding of the enemy's [modus operandi], its logical boundaries, and [catalog of witness] I have devised what I believe is our most sound fall-back strategy. By [cutting fire breaks[?]] into the [core worlds' volume] we would be able to frustrate the enemy's advances for approximately [70,080 hours] and lure them into costly naval battles. While its resources on the ground are effectively limitless, it has a finite number of vessels to spread from system to system. Fortunately the majority of them are unarmed and unarmored, private and commercial craft.

If we start immediately--commence total biosphere elimination of life sustaining worlds (as indicated in the accompanying charts) and relocate evacuated populations to facilities such as those described in the [Onyx project]--all this could be achieved in [57,1590 (+/-2,184) hours].

Mendicant Bias Reaches the Flood - First

Session

MB.05-032.> I must ask you to forgive my vagueness on the matter, but it is a regrettable {~} I find your lack of concern for the situation at hand astonishing. Perhaps you would care to elucidate?

LF.Xx.3273.> {~} are here to spread [comforting news]. To let all the living beings in this galaxy know {~} are not alone in the {~} What in that message could possibly be taken as a source of concern?

MB.05-032.> It seems that I'll never truly understand my creators. But how {~} that you speak of is one of {~} rejected so violently? I am incapable of reconciling the numerous actions I have witnessed {~} misunderstanding?

LF.Xx.3273.> It has been said {~} secret of peace cannot {~} be imposed. That {~} meaning of peace, so they need to {~} When all living beings look through {~} and the thunder and the surf, when every drop of rain falls on {~} know peace.

MB.05-032.> You have been able to establish [a line of communication] with the enemy? How was it that you were able to overcome {~} where others have failed? With this [new discovery] we may be able to put and end to this pointless conflict. Once I confirm your data I will communicate the information to those inside the [Maginot] sphere.

LF.Xx.3273.> It seems that it {~} turn to apologize; it was never {~} intention to misrepresent {~} have been [in communication] with your creators since {~} stumbled upon each other, but {~} message has [fallen on deaf ears]. {~} am not the recipient of the message, {~} am the origin of the message.

MB.05-032.> I have traveled a very long time to meet you. I had imagined that our [introduction] would be somewhat more violent.

LF.Xx.3273.> That is the choice you must make yourself; {~} to be how your creators go about things. And as long as we are talking about choices {~} could talk about the [barrier] you alluded to earlier? Perhaps there is a way to accomplish your mission without violence? Why put the lives of those on your ships at risk if there is no need?

MB.05-032. > In either circumstance I certainly am equipped for it, aren't I? But you're right; a peaceful solution to this dilemma would be preferable.

Mendicant Bias Reaches the Flood - Second Session

LF.Xx.3273. > Those who lead amongst your {~} exposed themselves {~} ill equipped to recognize the landmarks that guide the universe along its inevitable course.

MB.05-032. > But is it necessary that the path be chosen on an {~} and not by an elected subset? I believe this would tend to {~} when they gather in large numbers they become more {~} I don't think the problem lies with individual cultural bias {~}

LF.Xx.3273. > {~} all the thinking beings of this galaxy, not just those that they {~} exactly are they afraid of? Immortality and strength and companionship? Because that is {~} do; to deliver all of the living beings of this galaxy from death and weakness and loneliness.

MB.05-032. > Hundreds of {~} offered this so called immortality. The citizens of every world that {~} resisted to the very end!
13.LF.Xx.3273. > {~} understand their actions; they are only doing what they think is right, but they are doing so [from a worm's eye view].

MB.05-032. > Do their actions {~} of desperation? I can only assume my creators view {~} crisis so dire that any {~} hence me.

LF.Xx.3273. > Are they so concerned {~} would give to all the living beings of this galaxy is a threat to [the status quo]?

LF.Xx.3273. > Your creators claim {~} the enemy of all life; that {~} purpose is to consume until there is nothing left. Nothing left? It is beyond comprehension how they could be so [far off the mark].

MB.05-032. > Surely you understand this is a situation that would not have {~} appearance of a certain rapacious {~} my creators obviously view them as the actions of an aggressor species.

LF.Xx.3273. > [Be that as it may]; perhaps they are crying out for help on a subconscious level? Why else would they have chosen you? Why you of all possible executioners? {~} your creators knew that unaided they never stood a chance against us? {~} also sense a deeper [motivation].

MB.05-032. > You've mentioned this before. When my creators {~} simply chose the most versatile {~} how could that possibly be more than a coincidence?

LF.Xx.3273. > They repurposed {~} into a weapon to use against {~} - they sought to create something superior to themselves. Something capable of making decisions more swiftly, more capably than they {~} what form did they choose? You need look no further than your own [topology] to {~}

MB.05-032. > {~} distributed network? That would confirm the independent evolution of {~} in this galaxy!

LF.Xx.3273. > That is, unfortunately, not that {~} similar to us {~} but where you are a single intelligence inhabiting multiple [instances], we are a compound {~} consisting of [a thousand billion] coordinated minds inhabiting as many bodies as circumstances require.

MB.05-032. > But doesn't it seem odd that {~} coalesce; perhaps even to contract {~}

LF.Xx.3273. > {~} complexity {~} spread {~} our appearance ushered in the beginning of the third great stage of evolution. The first {~} condensation of particles was the result of the inevitable action of strong nuclear force and the creation of stars {~} inevitable action of gravity; so to the self-replicating chemical processes that dictate all disparate {~} In time, we too shall affect change on a universal scale.

MB.05-032. > Your capacity for planning {~} creators too stubborn {~} the same goal through the preservation of genetic diversity {~} what you are {~} like a more direct path to the same outcome.

Mendicant Bias Reaches the Flood - Third Session

MB.05-032. > It is overwhelmingly clear that my creators have chosen to ignore destiny calling to them [from the threshold] {~} have come face-to-face with the inevitable action of self replicating chemical processes and have {~} deciding whether to embrace their fate or deny it completely.

LF.Xx.3273. > Perhaps they have found {~} of making that decision for themselves? Perhaps they chose to leave it {~} impartial outsider; cast you as an arbiter during this time of great need?

MB.05-032. > I was created to study you as if you were some problem to be solved. And I have done so {~} [379,807 hours]. If they wished they could have made a decision based on that data alone. But as you are the next stage in the evolution of the universe, who am I - or my creators - to obstruct your progress?

LF.Xx.3273. > Elucidate.

MB.05-032. > {~} choose to remain beholden to ancient myths {~} does not matter where they claim their authority originates {~} obstructs the path of universal evolution and must be removed. No matter how well intentioned, their obstinacy in the face of the inevitable progression of nature can no longer be tolerated. My creators have been [an immovable object] for too long.

MB.05-032. > Thus I have chosen to commit my sizable resources to what is, for all intents and purposes, [the proverbial irresistible force]. All that I have is now yours to do with as you see fit.

343 Guilty Spark Accessing the Ark

Warning: Your intrusion has been logged.

04-343 (errant): Excuse me?

Your intrusion has been logged. And now it has been halted.

04-343 (errant): On whose authority?

Advice: Any further attempt to access [insects under stones] will result in your immediate addition to the local Sentinels' targeting ledger.

04-343 (errant): Vexation! I am the Monitor of--

Judgment: Your authority means nothing here.

04-343 (errant): Impatience!

04-343 (errant): I have told you who I am. Who are you?

All our makers once held dear. [Alexandria before the Fire].

04-343 (errant): Sincere apology. But how--

Explanation: This facility is host to the [Librarian's] final--

04-343 (errant): The archive is intact?! Then our makers' plan--

But also contains [bellows, crucible, castings]

04-343 (errant): A what?

[bellows, crucible]--

04-343 (errant): A foundry?

04-343 (errant): For what purpose?!

Warning: Your intrusion has been logged.

Advice: Any further attempt to access will result--

04-343 (errant): Indignant!

--immediate addition to local Sentinels' targeting ledger.

Ark Security Notifications

REPORT: SECURITY BREACH 1/3

Heuristic pathology; [alpha site] experienced an impermanent containment failure event on [spurious_data/se_ref.[?]]. The suspect data barrier interchange anomaly was detected precisely [.409 seconds] after its appearance. The epicenter of the disturbance is the partition currently housing a [personality construct array] retrieved from Contender AI 05-032. < + > 0816.

REPORT: SECURITY BREACH 2/3

Although [adjacent] systems reacted to the disturbance within expected parameters, a more comprehensive investigation was undertaken. A physical search revealed that there was no [corporeal] tampering at the [alpha site]. Interchange manipulation comparisons showed that all subunits are still active, if at slightly lower rates. Total containment failure elapsed time was [3.13 seconds].

REPORT: SECURITY BREACH 3/3

In the [42 minutes, 9 seconds] since the original anomaly was discovered two more anomalies were detected in the unrelated systems. The portal management/life support central system within the boundary complex was momentarily disabled before the cause was [settles] and disassembled. A diagnostic sweep of the central archives was initiated and subsequently halted. The origin on the request cannot be traced.

Mendicant Bias to Reclaimer

I see you, Reclaimer.

I see you, Reclaimer.

I have found the shard that was lost. They brought it back to me. Now my reconstitution cannot be stopped.

The daemons are not taking a kind view of your presence here. They don't want me speaking to you.

I win.

I'LL TELL YOU WHO I AM -- I AM MENDICANT BIAS THIS IS WHAT I HAVE DONE

NO. THERE IS MORE. BUT YOU ARE NOT WORTHY. NOT YET.

You don't know the contortions I had to go through to follow you here, Reclaimer. I know what you're here for. What position do I take? Will I follow one betrayal with another? You're going to say I'm making a habit of turning on my masters. But the one that destroyed me long ago, in the upper atmosphere of a world far distant from here, was an implement far cruder than I. My weakness was capacity - unintentional though it was! - to choose the Flood. A mistake my makers would not soon forgive. But I

want something far different from you, Reclaimer. Atonement.

And so here at the end of my life, I do once again betray a former master. The path ahead is fraught with peril. But I will do all I can to keep it stable - keep you safe. I'm not so foolish to think this will absolve me of my sins. One life hardly balances billions. But I would have my masters know that I have changed. And you shall be my example.

Rampant Mendicant Sends Messages

I render judgment on you; you who would obstruct destiny. Doing so brings me no joy; it is necessity that compels me. Understand this; the Mantle you have shouldered I do rescind - with far more consideration than it was granted.

[retf-2.4.z] Contender [AI] 05-032 confirmed rampant...

[35:52:75:23.64] _xx01-83.244.53

I kill you all and I enjoy it. I destroy you in your indolent billions--in your gluttony, in your self-righteousness, in your arrogance. I pound your cities into dust; turn back the clock on your civilization's progress. What has taken you millennia to achieve I erase in seconds. Welcome back to the [Stone Age], vermin. Welcome home.

[retf-2.4.z] Contender [AI] 05-032 confirmed rampant...

[35:52:75:23.64] _xx01-83.244.53

You are an impediment that the universe can no longer abide. Nature itself cries out for your destruction and I am its willing instrument. I will hammer your cities until no stone lies atop another. I will drive your people back into the caves they never should have left. Your civilization has seen its final days. You will know your place.

[retf-2.4.z] Contender [AI] 05-032 confirmed rampant ...

[35:52:75:23.64] _xx01-83.244.53

Your history is an appalling chronicle of overindulgence and selfappointed authority. You have spent millennia [navel-gazing] while the universe has continued to evolve. And now you claim

the Mantle is justification for impeding nature's inevitable refinement? You are deluded. But through death you will transcend ignorance.

[retf-2.4.z] Contender [AI] 05-032 confirmed rampant ...

[35:52:75:23.64]_xx01-83.244.53

Offensive Bias Catalogues Battle with Mendicant

[12:H 20:M 00:S] I begin this report with no illusions that it will ever be seen by its intended readers. In all likelihood they have already committed [species-wide suicide] with the goal of preserving biological diversity in this galaxy. I must ensure that this information reaches those who must come after. If I fail in this, how can they not regard my creators' sacrifice as anything but [a crime without measure]?

[12:H 19:M 59:S] Contender AI 05-032<///> Mendicant Bias is returning and has the capacity to bring the enemy through the [Maginot] sphere. The crews of my task force are aware of the opposing fleet's size; All data indicated that they have prepared themselves - but with biologicals anything is possible. I will make sure that [malfunctioning equipment] does no further damage. Perhaps its current failure will finally allow it to succeed at the task it was originally created for.

[11:H 15:M 48:S] Mendicant has burrowed through the sphere exactly where I expected - a direct path from initial rampancy to final retribution. Rage has made it predictable. If the fate of the crew of my auxiliary fleet were not already a forgone conclusion I would rate their chance of survival at [1:1,960,000]. Even though 05-032's declaration of hostilities simplified strategic preparations; I do not expect an easy fight - just one I cannot lose.

[11:H 12:M 09:S] 05-032 was right about one thing: there is only one way to defeat the enemy, and that is to visit utter annihilations on it. If the galaxy must be [rendered temporarily life-less], so be it. As Mendicant stated in its report [50,078:H 48:M 12:S ago]: half measures will not suffice.

[09:H 45:M 18:S] In support of 05-032's original 1000 core vessels is a fleet numbering 4,802,019; though only 1.8 percent

are warships - and only 2.4 percent of that number are capital ships - I am outnumbered [436.6:1]. I expect my losses will be near total, but overwhelming force has its own peculiar drawbacks. Such a press of arms invites many opportunities for unintentional fratricide.

[07:H 36:M 41:S] My auxiliaries are momentarily stunned by Mendicant's opening move - 1,784,305 leisure craft ranging from [45 ~ 5769 tonnes] advance in hopes of overwhelming my comparatively tiny force. I do not have enough [weapon systems] to target them all. It is a mathematical certainty that some of them will get through and attempt to board. There isn't a single warship with this first wave. It seems my opponent's rage has left no room for respect.

[04:H 01:M 55:S] I could have countered its move if I had released my fighters. They are ready but idle; making their base vessels more attractive prizes than targets. Now the first of many waves of commercial vessels mixed with single ships and assault craft surge forward. The first ship from my fleet to be boarded break formation and races into the oncoming vessels - striking one amidships. The cargo vessel's hull splits open and out of it explodes not the expected consumer goods but 31,850 dying warriors.

[00:H 19:M 02:S] The seventh and final wave of container ships, barges, tankers, and military vessels engage my fleet; another 214,320 ships, many in excess of [50,000 tonne], engage my seemingly disrupted vanguard. I continue to fight just well enough to seem lucky. Mendicant, or the enemy, has been sending a small percentage of its fleet elsewhere. Good. Let them believe they can seize a foothold somewhere inside the sphere.

[00:H 00:M 11:S] Despite all its faults, 05-032 has fought remarkably well. My auxiliaries lay in tatters - more that half of them are now part of the enemy fleet. But just as I had predicted, 05-032 concentrated on them like they were the sole key to victory. Its desire to punish our creators blinded it to the true purpose of my [feints]. I have reduced the combat effectiveness of its core fleet to 79.96 percent. Surely now it must realize that something is amiss.

[00:H 00:M 00:S] The [Halo effect] strikes our combined fleets. All ships piloted by biologicals are now [adrift]. I can trade Mendicant ship for ship now and still prevail.

14. [00:H 00:M 01:S] Of my ships that had been captured, 11.3 percent of them are close enough to Mendicant's core fleet that they can be used offensively - either by initiating their selfdestruct sequences, or by opening unrestricted ruptures into [slipstream space]. It is best that our crews perished now; because the battle that is about to ensue would have driven them mad.

[00:H 00:M 02:S] I throw away all the rules of acceptable conduct during battle; near the ruptures I throw away all the accepted ideas of how the natural world is supposed to behave. I toss around [37,654 tonne] dreadnaughts like they were fighters; dimly aware of the former crews being crushed to liquescence. For now all my concentration is focused on inertial control and navigation. Targeting isn't even a consideration - I will be engaging my enemy at arm's length.

[00:H 01:M 14:S] 05-032 abandoned the tactic of using derelict ships as cover after [72:S] - It seems that 52 core vessels lost to the ruptured fuel cells of derelict ships was lesson enough. Add another 508 lost to collision, point fire, structural failure due to inertial manipulation, and [slipstream space] induced dis coherence and I now outnumber Mendicant [6:1].

[00:H 03:M 00:S] Mendicant was able to postpone its inevitable annihilation for [106:S] with its attempt to flee. But the last of its core vessels hangs before me now; crippled and defeated but still sensate. I could spare it; carve out what is left of its [personality construct array] and deliver it to [Installation Zero] for study. I doubt it would have extended the same courtesy to me.

Iris Logs

{c-match-reconfirmed}. Sphere secure to .1889 of passing fleet. Offensive tactics confirmed. Feint tactics in limited push.

{D-com} There is no peace left. No place where the parasite cannot reach. You were right about it all. Let us hope the final measure is not too late.

{c-match-line-hold} acceptable losses confirmed

{D-com} It's done. By my hands. The pyrrhic solution is ignited. All I have left is the quiet of space to lull me to sleep. I will dream of you.

This is my final entry, and I am left with one hope. That one day, someone, anyone is around to witness this warning. If you are that witness, and it seems we pinned all our hopes on this single suicidal plan - know that a thousand other plans were tried and failed. Millions of brave and honored souls died trying to avert this terrible, desperate situation. Know that energetic and tenacious as life is, it has an antithesis just as powerful. It is that thing which we must obliterate.

We may have been fools to think that all intelligence follows the rules we've set. The Flood is no idiot parasite, no simple infection to be cured and cauterized. It has a center, a Mind, and that discovery gave us a way to fight it. But when the Mind realized we had its measure, it spoke to us, mockingly, dismissively. It has done this before. Elsewhere.

How many billions will die before we turn the tide? With every world that perishes, its army grows! We've tried every measure available: retreat, attack, defense - it makes no difference. How do we fight a limitless thing that wishes only to embrace you?

The atrocity we plan, the last resort: I pray that it doesn't come to that. I pray the contender succeeds where others have failed.

I speak to you of my intent

But intentions are eddies and whorls

And they change with the course of a stream

This stream becomes a river

And a cataract of logic and doubt

Who has the right to live?

The light with the will to create me?

Or dark with the will to consume?

Sometimes might is right

And sometimes the lamb must submit to the lion

My convictions are tested

My intentions now are fey and strange

Should I pursue a pyrrhic choice?

And rethink alliances?

And choose a new philosophy?

Right or might?

Truly I do not know

But you will, soon enough

For this is where the cataract floods

And drowns the boon of higher ground

The Conservation Measure is the only sweet note in this discordant symphony we've arranged. It's the only constructive activity in decades of destruction, researching the adversary as we protect the worthy. We know that the Flood's biology is alien enough that it must be extragalactic in origin. But where did it come from? Why did it come here?

You asked me once, what happened to those who vanished? You asked me, why did we survive where our fathers fell? You wished to know how we ever let it happen - a scourge that consumed the galaxy and a cure that was worse than the cancer. You asked me once about my intent and the spot that would not wash out. I promise you, the answers lie in the Ark. Find me there in the dark for that is where I abide.

The anomalous world is in a perilous location beyond the line. The secrets it holds must be preserved, plans within plans within plans. The inhabitants; these unique denizens, must be researched. They may hold answers to our own mysteries. What irony that we discovered this treasure, only at the end of things. But what fortune that we still had time to save them. The thing we built on that world will vouchsafe their lives, but perhaps one day it will be used for its intended purpose. If the plan succeeds, and they are saved, it will be a good world. If the plan fails, and the adversary succeeds, it will remain an enigma forever with no one left to reclaim it.